

TAVEUNI:

THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC'S TINY ROTARY GEM

The only Rotary club on Fiji's third largest island, Taveuni, the Rotary Club of Taveuni could well be the most active club in the South West Pacific.

Hovering at around 10 members, the Rotary Club of Taveuni represents a cultural mix of Taveuni residents. The small club achieves big things, however, with the club's aim to complete projects at the rate of \$50,000 value per member per year.

For the past 12 years, they have managed the largest free cataract program in the South Pacific. All expenses are covered, including surgery, post-op medication, transportation, meals, accommodation, laundry, toiletries, sunglasses and more.

Each year, surgeons from New Zealand, Australia and the United States – and in 2017 Argentina – travel to Taveuni for a two-week intensive operating schedule. Partly funded in recent years by a Rotary Foundation Global Grant, local community volunteers produce around 400 meals each day for patients. The program owns 100 single mattresses and pillows, in addition to all required bed linen. Surgical equipment purchased



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over the years is valued at more than \$550,000, including two operating tables.

The Rotary Club of Taveuni is also heavily involved in education projects. Rotary teams of volunteers and paid local tradespeople and labourers have constructed 12 preschools so far. Funding originated from Rotary clubs in Australia and New Zealand, matched by funds from the New Zealand Government's Partnerships Fund through Rotary New Zealand World Community Service (RNZWCS).

The teams have also built a 40-bed girls' dormitory at a secondary school, with 10 bedrooms, an ablution block and outdoor covered areas. All furniture, including beds, cupboards, desks and vanities, were also built by the team. They additionally undertook extensive renovations of a 50-year-old girls' dormitory that had fallen

into disrepair. As with the secondary school, the team built all the furniture required for the 80-bed facility.

In another project facilitated by the club, more than 4000 school desks and other school furniture has been collected by Rotary clubs in New Zealand and Australia and sent to Taveuni in recent years. Prior to these efforts, most primary students in rural schools sat on the floor.

Eighty-five disadvantaged students with outstanding ability are now fully funded through the club's scholarship program. Every student to date has progressed to university or quality employment.

An ongoing project is the installation of solar power systems in rural schools. These are financially sustainable and guaranteed for 10 years, professionally installed, with supporting labour and logistics from the club. Without solar,



The Rotary Club of Taveuni's team of workers unload a container from New Zealand, as club member Geoffrey Amos looks on.

the schools have no other means of receiving electricity. The club has further established digital learning rooms at some schools, providing e-learning opportunities for students in remote areas to equip them for employment after they complete their studies.

A definite and continuing need exists to improve health outcomes for Fijian women between 35 and 50 years of age. Through partnership with fellow Fiji NGO Improving Health Through Education, the Rotary Club of Taveuni provides pap smears and other medical examinations for 100 women each year, with complimentary accommodation, transport, meals and equipment. A medical team is helping train local medical personnel to manage the program after receiving qualified training. Larger water projects, school upgrades and support for the Taveuni hospital are ongoing.

Recently, PDG Stuart Batty visited Taveuni Island to evaluate Rotary and MFAT-funded activities undertaken since Cyclone Winston in February 2016.

"Rotary's response is second to none anywhere in Fiji, with rebuilding school facilities the priority," Stuart said.

Taveuni's three building teams, with continuing support from clubs in New Zealand and Australia,

RNZWCS, RAWCS and the New Zealand Government's Partnership Funds, have built nine new teachers' houses and school ablution blocks. They further completed damaged computer and library rooms and completely rebuilt one school along with distributing DIK furniture donations.

"Significantly, all buildings previously built on the island by Rotary, including preschools, suffered no damage from Cyclone Winston, when others were reduced to debris," Stuart said.

While on the island, Stuart inspected a number of pending activities, including the rebuild of a burnt-out building in the hospital grounds. It will be redesigned as a house for birthing mothers and family members of hospital patients, with five bedrooms, a kitchen and lounge. The cost of the rebuild will be met in part by the Ministry of Health, which will provide the materials, while DIK will provide most of the furnishings. Donations for the \$25,000 fit-out are currently being collected.

"The club's tireless efforts to help their community are a credit to Rotary," Stuart said. "The 24/7 commitment of members like Geoffrey Amos is truly impressive."

If you would like more information or to get involved, please contact info@rnzwc.org •

RESEARCHERS ROCK!

By the time you read this issue of *RDU*, the research committee of Australian Rotary Health will have met for the 33rd time. At the first meeting, in 1985, the committee had about \$100,000 to allocate towards research into cot



Australian Rotary Health with CEO Joy Gillett

death or sudden infant death syndrome.

In that year, \$100,552 was allocated to six research projects, including \$11,637 to Professor Terry Dwyer for his work in Tasmania looking at the high incidence of cot deaths in that State. Over the next eight years, a further \$320,000 was allocated to Professor Dwyer and his research results are now well-known for the guidelines on sleeping position of babies.

For research funding in 2018, a budget of over \$1.5 million has been allocated in Mental Health research project grants, scholarships and fellowships. The current research committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Jane Pirkis, will allocate these funds to the best and brightest researchers in Australia. Research project grants are in "Mental Health of Young Australians", post-doctoral fellowships are in "Prevention of Mental Health Disorders" and Ian Scott PhD scholarships in mental health generally. This meeting will involve interviews, discussion and debate amongst the 10 expert members of the committee – along with some directors and staff and, finally, recommendations will be made to the board for funding.

A further \$600,000 will be available for funding partner PhD scholarships for research in other areas of health, with co-contribution from a Rotary club, Rotary district or Rotarian.

Thank you to the 80 plus members of the research committee over the past 30 years for their valuable time and their expertise, freely given to Rotary. •